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A Matter of Blood

The Dog-Faced Gods: Book One

Written by Sarah Pinborough

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A MATTER OF BLOOD



The Dog-Faced Gods

BOOK ONE

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GOLLANCZ
LONDON

Prologue

The orchestra of flies buzzed above the mutilated corpse. To the man watching from the doorway they looked like an unruly audience in the gallery cheering on their support. More scuttered across the macabre stage below, flitting their way amidst the heaving mass of maggots, giving the very dead individual that was their theatre pretence of movement, life. The large window against the far wall was open, but still the room stank of decay. The man in the doorway sighed and for a second the flies stopped their dreadful whine and the shiny white pupae paused in their writhing.

The body was lying on the antique wooden desk, one arm hanging limply over the side. Where the steady trickle of blood dripped silently the thick red carpet was now a much deeper crimson. There was nothing elegant in the rips across the torso tearing apart the dead man's skin and exposing organs and entrails. It must have happened fast though, the man in the doorway thought. Otherwise he'd have heard screaming.

The buzzing started again and he gritted his teeth.

'This has to stop.'

The noise got louder.

He stared at the body, and the heavy workman's boots that protruded from the tan chinos that John MacBrayne wore whenever he was speaking on television or leading one of his ridiculously ineffective protest meetings, as if by not buying a

decent suit he was making a statement against The Bank and its more controversial interests. Its alleged *more controversial interests, he silently corrected himself. Still, it was clear that Mr MacBrayne, for all his irritating tenacity, would be leading no more marches.*

'I don't know what you think you're achieving,' he said, 'or what point you're trying to make.' For the first time irritation crept into his voice. This wasn't like the last two. This was going to take some effort to clear up; John MacBrayne had become something of an unlikely public figure. He looked at the mutilated body. The deep tan from years spent in the African sun had faded now into a drained pallor. Death had taken hold and he had to admit its effects were mildly fascinating, even after all this time. He drew his attention back to the hovering insects.

'We need to meet with the others. They can help you.'

For a moment the room was still again, and then the flies and maggots rose as one from the body with such force that the corpse shivered visibly before falling still. The air was alive as the swarm twisted and turned, flecks of black filling each corner of the vast room before pulling into a shape that was almost human, and for the briefest of moments, a flicker of sharp eyes and blond hair peered out from within the rippling body.

The man in the doorway smiled. That was a mistake. The unnatural figure exploded, sending flies like splinters shooting across the room. The man flinched despite himself, one arm rising slightly to protect his eyes. He lowered it slowly.

'This has to stop,' he repeated against the bitter hiss of the swarm. The dark shadow didn't answer but twisted away from him and, in a cloud of tiny beating wings, escaped out through the window and into the cool afternoon air.

The man in the doorway remained where he was for a

moment, thoughtfully watching it disappear, before turning his attention back to the dead man on the desk. He sighed again. He had so much to deal with, though this would be manageable, if tiresome. He looked again at the open window. First, he had a phone call to make. The room and the dead man stayed silent as he turned and quietly closed the door on them.

Chapter One

It's the little things that count.

Carla Rae's cooling body was testament to that. Her wide eyes no longer shone as the drying surfaces became sticky. With no further call to pump through the lifeless veins, her blood settled heavily in her limbs. The cheap electric clock on the bedside table ticked the minutes away, moving on from the moment of her death without even a hitching breath of hesitation. The world continued. Twenty-five-year-old Carla Rae didn't. There would be no twenty-sixth birthday. The inner mechanics of her body were accepting that, even if in the dying moments her mind had raged against the inevitability.

Tick tock. Silent body-clock stopped.

Gases began to accumulate where stomach acids were no longer working to digest the Chinese take-away she'd eaten not that many hours before. Soon, if left untouched, her flat belly would rise into a swollen ball of foul-smelling air before it escaped loudly in a last and woefully late warcry against the silence of death – but it wouldn't come to that for Carla Rae. The small pinprick in her arm, the life now growing in her eyes and the words scrawled in crimson across her naked chest would ensure a neat and clinical autopsy on a metal bed less soft than that on which she currently lay. Not that she would notice. The soft flesh that

had been Carla Rae's home was beyond feeling anything at all.

The real matter of life isn't about decisions, it's about choices. Decisions are the big things; they're thought out, weighed and evaluated. Each brings a unique set of consequences, maybe good, maybe otherwise, but they're of our own making, and that is a comfort in itself. Even the bad ones we'll take on the chin, albeit quietly railing against our own stupidity. Decisions make us think we're in control.

It's the little things that count: the choices.

It's enough to drive you crazy if you let it: we don't think about choices; we just *make* them. And yet those fleeting moments are dependent on the moment or mood, and all entwined with an endless series of other choices made by people unknown. It's almost funny – if you've got that black kind of sense of humour. Little choices stories are everywhere, but they're blaming luck, or fate – they scream out from the pages of grubby tabloid newspapers and cheap TV channels. But those stories are wrong.

There is no luck. Or fate. It's your own choices that will fuck you up.

Or at least that's what DI Cass Jones was thinking as he stood in the doorway looking at the naked body face up on the untidy bed. What God-awful mistake did she make that she died here, on these stained sheets, in this shithole estate? Did she decide to walk instead of getting a cab? Did she accept a drink from the wrong almost-handsome stranger? Five minutes earlier, five minutes later – who knew where

she'd be? Maybe still lying here, maybe breathing in ignorance somewhere else. It always came down to choices.

He sighed, his brown eyes bleary from a day that had already been too long. Whichever it was, the game was all over for her; now she was just one more statistic in a world that was rapidly caring less about statistics.

Outside, night was only just beginning to crack the sky, fracturing the deep blue of the dying day with streaks of orange and red, filling the small bedroom with an eerie gloom. It had been a hot day and the stale air was rank as stagnant pond water. Cass found himself breathing shallowly through his mouth.

'Can someone open a window or is that too much to ask?'

The poised camera flashed brightly over the body before the unfamiliar photographer turned, his green plastic suit rustling. 'Too much to ask.' He grinned, his face young and free of lines, which was enough in itself to make the detective inspector want to punch him.

'Say cheese.' Before Cass could react, the bed and the figures around it became black voids haloed in white as in the gloom a haze of buzzing flies darted to safety in the corners.

'Jesus Christ!' The backs of his eyes had the scene imprinted in reverse lights and shadows before it started to fade.

'Sorry.' The cameraman shrugged, still smiling. 'I sometimes get this overwhelming urge to photograph someone that's living. Call me twisted.'

From beside the bed, a crouched figure rose. 'And if you carry on like that, it'll be only the living you're working with – if you're lucky to be working at all.' The voice was acid-sharp and the young man visibly shrivelled into his plastic coating as he gurgled a muted apology.

'Now piss off and take those cameras back to the van.' He was still unimpressed.

DI Jones stared at the junior examiner as he squeezed awkwardly past, two cameras in one hand, the heavy protective case in the other. When he was trapped somewhere between Cass's shoulder and the doorframe, the DI leaned forward.

'If I ever hear that picture's been developed, I'll be looking for you.' For brief moment, Cass was sure he could hear the boy's heart pause. 'Do you understand?'

The assistant nodded vigorously and Cass shifted half an inch to his left and let him go.

He watched him wearily, for a moment overwhelmed by the sheer stupidity of youth, as the boy rapidly disappeared into the mêlée of SOCOs filling the rest of the flat. He needed to learn his place, and he also needed to learn that DI Cass Jones wasn't known for his perky sense of humour. And, more importantly for the assistant, neither was Dr Mark Farmer. In the current lack-of-jobs market there was no room for stupid mistakes, and one day, when he was older and wiser, he might realise that Cass had done him a favour.

'New assistant?'

'My penance for training the last one up so well.' The ME pulled his hood back, thick silver curls springing free across his head and down to his shoulders, turning him from coroner to ageing rock star in one swift movement. He frowned. 'What are you doing here, Jones? This isn't your case.'

'It is now.' The air trapped by the nailed-down window seemed denser, almost clinging to the body like a mourning relative. It felt like day-old cigarette smoke against the roof of Cass's mouth as he said, 'Bowman was rushed to hospital

this morning with a suspected burst appendix. Looks like he could be out of action for weeks, so his caseload's been passed on to me. No extra pay, of course.'

'Of course.' The ME shrugged. 'Although peritonitis is nasty. He's lucky to be alive.'

'No luck involved: the stupid bastard's been complaining about feeling like shit for a couple of weeks. He should have gone and got it sorted ages ago. It's not like the police don't still get NHS.'

'Ah yes, the perks of being a civil servant.' The coroner looked ready to launch into his usual bitter commentary on the state of Britain, the world and life-everlasting should he be given even the slightest hint of encouragement, but Cass, with little interest in politics and even less in Farmer's particular viewpoint, refused to be drawn, forcing the ME to fall silent. Cass was too tired and pissed off to be a willing sounding board, and the stench in the room was such that surely they all wanted to be free of it as soon as possible.

He peered at the girl's naked body. The poor cow's ribs jutted upwards over her concave stomach in a way that suggested either poverty or an advanced eating disorder. Given the cheap dye job on her almost-ginger hair, perhaps an attempt at blonde, Cass figured the former. Her large nipples were now simply islands of pink on the tiny curves that were almost breasts. Would she be any less flat-chested standing upright? He doubted it.

'What is this? Number four?'

The ME stood alongside him. 'Yes – at least we can presume so. I'll confirm when I get the toxicology results back after the PM. You're going to have some catching up to do if you want half a chance of solving this one. I'll send all my notes over to you. I presume your sergeant's still getting *debriefed* by Bowman's sergeant? So she should have

a good idea of what's going on. Or is that over now?'

Cass was surprised. Farmer wasn't normally one for loaded remarks, at least outside of those that served to support his delicate left-wing sensibilities. For once, Cass would have preferred that; Claire May's private life was none of Farmer's business. He ignored the question, saying, 'May's staying on the Jackson and Miller case and I'm keeping Blackmore on this one. Stupid to switch them over as I'm working both. If I change them we'll all be confused rather than just me.'

His fingers itched for the feel of a cigarette and a quiet space to just empty his mind and breathe. It had been a bitch of a day, and he figured Farmer's hadn't been much better. Resources were tight and everyone was overworked. The image of the smiling bobby on the beat had been murdered long ago. His unsmiling eyes scanned the bed's contents.

The young woman's skin was pale, with no hint of tan lines, either fresh, or the final fading memories of a holiday long gone. An empty ache touched the pit of his stomach. It wasn't quite pity, but it was close enough. Neither he nor the doc had had as bad a day as the dead girl in front of them.

NOTHING IS SACRED was daubed across the top of her chest, below her angular collarbones and above her poor excuse for breasts. Somehow that thick crimson splatter made her death even more pathetic than the dingy flat ever could. *Nothing is sacred.*

'You're telling me, mate,' he muttered under his breath, directing the words at the ghost of the stranger who'd stood where he was standing now, intently painting the letters onto the dead woman's cooling flesh, no doubt thinking he was doing something profound. Cass Jones knew better.

There was no message in murder; this was just some sick bastard making excuses for his choices.

'How long's she been dead?'

'A few hours. He may have had her here longer, but I'd say he killed her around about midday or one o'clock.'

'Who found her?' Cass was surprised anyone had found her at all. Most of the flats in this block were either condemned, with squatters in, or inhabited by the kind of people that had no concern for their neighbours.

'He wanted her found. There was a boombox on, playing some kind of thrash metal music; he must have put it on just as he left. It was loud enough to piss off the people on either side. They kicked the door in around four and then called the police. And here we are.'

'And here we are,' Cass repeated softly. A thin bracelet that probably wasn't real gold hung from the wrist that flopped over the side of the bed, a miniature horse hanging from it. Her lucky charm? 'What about her eyes?' he asked. They looked normal enough, but he wasn't the expert.

'I'll let you know once I've taken a look under the microscope. I can't see properly in this light. She's not been dead long enough for them to develop, but I'm presuming she's the same as the others.'

Cass figured the doctor was right. 'Who was she?'

'Her name's Carla Rae. Your lot have her purse and bag. Her ID card was in it. She's twenty-five, unemployed, unmarried. She was a nothing. A nobody.' On the other side of the bed, the ME gathered the tools of his trade together. 'I'm done here. I'll get the body-baggers in and get her back to the lab. Should have an initial report for you by end of play tomorrow.'

Crouched by the bed, Cass nodded slightly. *A nobody. A nothing.* For the first time in their long association, the DI

realised that perhaps he didn't like the ME all that much. He doubted Carla Rae would have either. A small bruise had bloomed around the tiny pinprick in her arm and he froze for a moment, wondering whether he could feel her calling out for answers.

Outside, street lamps flickered into humming existence. Cass sucked in a lungful of the woman's death before standing up and stepping back so the paramedics could roll her into the black zip-up. He glanced at his watch, the numbers glowing naggingly back at him, and his heart speeded up; shit. He needed to kick his lethargy back into touch. It was just gone five-thirty and he had to be in Soho in thirty minutes' time. It was his day to collect.

The dying embers of the day clung to the skyline, and peering blearily out through the windscreen Cass wondered if maybe the world might truly be in the grip of some insanity that was slowly hugging it closer and refusing to let go. *Things were going to get better.* That's what the newspapers and perfectly presented newsreaders kept repeating. Cass couldn't see it though. As far as he could tell, they were all sinking deeper and deeper into the shit, and no one had a rope to cling to, let alone a shovel big enough to dig them out. And as the world got crazier, so did the rules, leading to situations like this one, which had him heading into Soho for a transaction all the bosses over at Scotland Yard must know about but obviously preferred to ignore. Maybe they liked to pretend their shit didn't stink the same as everyone else's.

But then, he figured, lighting a cigarette as the traffic crawled towards the inevitable central London almost-gridlock, what did he know? He'd been wallowing in the brown stuff for longer than he cared to remember. Smoke

filled the confined space and he grinned, enjoying it more because it was illegal to be smoking inside the car. Understanding the thrill of breaking rules was what made Cass Jones such a good policeman. Despite his disgruntled colleagues' assertions that Cass was just lucky when it came to solving his cases, he knew luck had nothing to do with it. Cass was a good copper because he thought like a criminal, and that was all there was to it. He took another long drag before winding down the window, letting the smoke escape to join the other poisonous fumes belching out from the vehicles shuffling their way through the centre of town. The air reeked of life.

The heaviness he'd felt watching the dead woman's body being bagged up finally lifted as the car filled with the earthy noises of the city. There wasn't a place in the world to beat London Town. It was grimy and gritty and cold and damp, but it was a tough old place that had survived for centuries; the ghosts of the past lurked on every street in the shape of the buildings and the plaques that proudly declared their long-gone residents, bolstering the living with the solid anchor of their heritage. It would take a lot to bring London and her Londoners to their knees. They might be buckling under the recession, but the city would find a way to bring them all through. It always did.

He flicked the butt out of the window and thought of Carla Rae again. London's residents now at least had the prospect of a serial killer to look forward to. There had been four dead women found in the same circumstances in the space of two months, and in these straitened times, where bad news of some sort or another filled the papers every day, the press wouldn't pass up a juicy story like this once they'd joined the dots. At least once this was splattered across the pages of the tabloids it might distract the masses

from their own misery for a while. Once they'd devoured the details of the deaths – the *murders* – of those less fortunate, then out of the woodwork would come everyone who'd ever known them, or dated them, or been in the same bar, or who'd just always had the feeling that fate would not be kind. Everyone loved the thrill of *it could have been me*. It made them feel lucky, when of course there was no luck. There were only choices.

Cass didn't care that people would get a thrill from the death of Carla Rae; that was only human nature. What he cared about was that the press didn't get hold of too much information. The words scrawled across the women's chests, *that* they could have. But the eyes were different. They needed to hold back those details if they were ever going to weed out the crazies who would be lining up to confess as soon as the papers hit the stands.

It was nearly an hour after leaving the tower block in Newham that he finally edged the Audi out past a bus and pulled into Denman Street. The narrow street just off the Piccadilly end of Shaftesbury Avenue was a tiny vein almost lost in the heart of the city, but as with most things, appearances were deceptive. He left his car in the cramped and ridiculously overpriced NCP car park and walked the few steps in the cooling air to the discreet entrance to Moneypenny's, one of Artie Mullins' nightclubs, and checked his watch again. He was still late.

Cass pushed the button by the door and then looked up at the small camera attached almost invisibly at the corner of the building. A moment later the buzzer sounded and he was inside, jogging down the stairs to the basement bar. Below the street it could be any time of day or night, and there was something about that which appealed to Cass. Time stood still away from the hustle and bustle of the city

and the rise and fall of the sun, and that allowed a sense of freedom, even if it was only a short-lived flight of the imagination.

'You're late.' Arthur – Artie to his friends – Mullins sat at the long bar, sipping beer from a tall glass. 'If it was any other fucker I might think they weren't coming.' He grinned, one gold cap flashing against the tarred brown of the rest of his teeth. 'Not you though, Jones. I think you'd collect even if some bastard had taken your kneecaps out.' He stood up and pulled out a second stool. 'Beer?'

Cass nodded and sat down. 'Sorry. It's been one of those days.'

'Aren't they all?' Like most of London's hard men, Artie had spent a lot of time body-building in gyms in the past and his thickset frame looked out of place behind the slick modern bar. As he bent over Cass could make out the start of a paunch under his polo shirt. Cass wasn't fooled by it. Artie might be pushing sixty, with his gym days well behind him, but he was still one of the most dangerous men in the criminal underworld. Cass liked him, though. He couldn't help himself.

Artie pulled a bottle of Beck's from the row of illuminated fridges beneath the mirrored back bar and popped the lid off before handing it across. 'Here you go. Same as normal.'

'Thanks.' Cass left the thick brown manila envelope on the marble surface. He wouldn't bother counting it – Artie Mullins was no mug. He wouldn't rip off the police.

'It's a funny old world we're in, isn't it?' Artie's face cracked into a grin that sent a shockwave of wrinkles across his leathered face. It was the same comment he always made on pick-up days, and as usual Cass couldn't think of an answer. He clinked his bottle with Artie's and took a long swallow. It *was* a funny world. There was no denying that.

Back in 2011, as the government realised that there was no way the country could financially sustain itself, the real no-holds-barred cutbacks began. They didn't even bother trying to dress them up. The NHS virtually disappeared for all except the chosen few sectors of society. No state pensions for anyone over forty-five – and those that were already paying out were to be cut back to the minimum. Police pay became performance-related: the more arrests that led to convictions, the more you got paid. Although still running in principle, in reality that initiative worked for about a week, because the gap between arrest and conviction was often months, even years, and the paperwork took forever to fill in and keep track of.

They all still claimed it when they could, because of course arrests and convictions were still being made, but then someone came up with a more reliable way of getting paid. The police chiefs sitting in their ivory towers and dreaming up these half-arsed schemes chose to ignore the fact that it was much easier for the rank and file to take their performance-related pay in cash from men like Arthur 'Artie' Mullins, a tax-free cash bonus for simply not arresting certain people; in effect, for leaving the firms alone. Cass always thought of it as a non-performance-related pay scheme.

In the main, most coppers – Cass among them – were happy to take it. No one wanted to spend their days chasing low-life scum just so they could earn a decent wage. There would always be people out there selling drugs, and even more that wanted to buy them, and yes, they could drive themselves into early graves chasing them all endlessly, but what would be the point? There was always someone else more than happy to take over, and as far as Cass was concerned, they could carry right on with their business, as long

as they didn't start making things dangerous for mainstream society.

The world wasn't fair. Instead, like Cass, it was just tired – but when those firms stepped across the line and let their business affect the ordinary world of the nine-to-fivers, then he felt his blood rise and the policeman in him came to life. And as long as that didn't happen, the system worked just fine and everyone was happy.

'Today's been in a league of its own.' The beer was cool and it left a refreshingly bitter after-taste at the back of his throat.

'Yeah?' On the other side of the bar, Artie watched him. 'They still got you coming after me for the murder of those two boys?' His eyes were hard. 'Not that I have to ask. I've developed a case of permanent plainclothes shadow. It's a right pain in the arse when I'm trying to do business. I should sue you lot for loss of income.'

Cass shrugged and Artie smiled. Beneath the surface warmth, there was something of the shark in it.

'Funny how my money buys safety for my employers, but not for me, isn't it?'

'You know the bonus doesn't cover that kind of shit. They might have been aiming for Macintyre, but whoever shot those kids broke the rules. All bets are off in this case.'

There was a pause and Artie sipped his beer, then looked at Cass thoughtfully over the rim of the glass. For his own part, Cass lit a cigarette and then met the man's gaze. He was tired and all he wanted to do was go and shower Carla Rae's death away, but he'd known this conversation was on the cards. The boys had been gunned down the week before, and all fingers pointed to Artie Mullins. For those screaming for a quick arrest, Artie was the obvious choice. Sam Macintyre was becoming quite a force among the firms, and he

was a clear rival to Artie's rule. It was pretty obvious that he had been the drive-by shooter's target, even though it was the two kids, who just happened to be passing by, who ended up bleeding to death on the pavement. The whole thing was a fuck-up and everyone was screaming for a name, the press, the commissioner, even the rival firms. Both sides of the law wanted it sorted quickly so they could get a swift return to the status quo.

'What's *your* view though, Detective Inspector?' Artie put his glass down. 'You think I did it?'

'No.' Cass met his gaze. 'Not your style.' He meant it too. Artie Mullins had been around a long time. If he'd wanted Sam Macintyre taken out, he wouldn't have done it Hollywood Mafia style. 'Not that my opinion counts for much,' he added. 'I'm only the officer in charge. My job is just to do as I'm told and take the shit if we don't catch someone.'

'It counts to me.' The cold glint had left Artie's sunken eyes and Cass felt a small knot untie in his stomach. He wasn't ashamed of being slightly afraid of Arthur Mullins. It was probably a healthy response.

'I don't want Macintyre dead.' Artie sniffed. 'Not yet anyway. He's ambitious, but that's not always a bad thing. And the Irish are better than the Yardies. That lot don't have any code. And if I *did* want him sorted, then I wouldn't have done it so fucking loudly. I'd have taken him out somewhere private – somewhere he wouldn't be found.'

Cass nodded. 'That's what I figured. But you're the top dog, Artie. They all think it's you. You're the one who's potentially got the most to lose by Macintyre's rise.'

'Then you're going to have to convince them otherwise.' Artie winked. 'Although they've got no evidence it was me, so they can hang off my arse and follow me around for as long as they want. Suits me fine – saves me sorting myself

out some extra protection while persuading the Irish this was nothing to do with me.'

'But if it wasn't you, it was still someone. Those two kids are still dead.'

Artie nodded. He leaned forward, keeping his voice low so that his drawn-out north London mumble was almost a growl. 'I'm no grass, Jonesy, everyone knows that, but if I had something on this one, trust me, I'd give it to you. We've had a nice little balance since we started the arrangement between you lot and us lot. We get on with our business and you get on with yours.' He shook his head.

'I'd never have gone for a hit like that. Not in a public place with schoolkids around. The way I see it is you'd have to be one of three things to take a pop at someone like that: plain stupid, a lunatic, or too powerful to care about the consequences.'

Cass wasn't sure if it was the dim lighting or whether a dark shadow passed across Artie's face. It was almost like a flash of fear, but Cass found that hard to believe. Who was there for Artie Mullins to be afraid of in the London underworld? The moment passed and the old gangster smiled. 'And I may be a bit of all three, but not enough of any one of them to make this my doing.' He paused. 'I rest my case, your honour.'

'I'll tell them that back at the station. I'm sure they'll take your word for it.'

Artie laughed, and then coughed, the rattle in his chest declaring a lifetime of too many cigarettes and not enough fresh air. 'You do that.' He waited till the small fit had passed. 'So if you haven't been trying to nick my arse today what's been keeping you so busy?'

'They think Bowman's bloody appendix has burst. I've got to cover his cases until he gets back, but fuck knows

when that will be.' He shook his head. 'So now I'm working two murder cases and all because that bloody jobsworth didn't want to take a couple of days away from his desk.'

He drained his beer and picked up the brown envelope before getting up from his stool. 'I'd better go. It's going to be an early start in the morning and I'm not designed for dawn.' He tucked the money inside his jacket. The plain-clothes officers who were no doubt watching the club would know what he was doing here, but there was no point in making it too obvious. Appearances were everything.

'I'll do my best to get them off your back, Artie, but all I can advise is sit tight. We've got no evidence leading back to you, so you know how it goes. Keep up the "no comment" line if we pull you in and they'll have to back off in the end.'

'I know the drill. Done it often enough over the years.' He grinned. 'Now fuck off before the girls start turning up or you'll never leave.'

Cass smiled, although he could feel it was slightly sheep-ish. He knew his own weaknesses, but he wasn't sure how much he liked other people spotting them that easily. It sometimes felt to Cass that he'd spent his life trying to mould himself into a good man, and in most ways he'd managed, but when it came to the opposite sex, the leopard couldn't quite get rid of those spots. He'd almost given up trying.

'We all have our sins, Artie. I've learned to live with mine.'

'That's what I like about you, Jonesy. You know your shit smells the same as mine.' Cass headed back towards the stairs and the pavement, where time had been slowly ticking by.

'You know, if you ever get bored paying taxes and fancy a change of sides you've always got a job working with me.'

Cass laughed and waved, but didn't answer. He took the

stairs two at a time and was happy to get out into the cool night air. In some ways, Artie wasn't that different from the police commissioner. What neither understood was that he just couldn't see things in terms of sides any more. It was just everyone doing their thing, and the way Cass saw it, he sat somewhere in the middle. If he ever had been on the good side, he'd lost that place ten years ago when he was undercover. Everyone knew that. There was no going back, no matter how much they all pretended. All things considered, he was pretty happy that he'd learned to live with it.